USING BLOG TO ENHANCE ENGLISH WRITING SKILL AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THAILAND

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Abstract

This research aimed to examine the effectiveness of using blog with high school students, and investigated students' perception when they learn writing through the blog. The participants for this study were 50 secondary school students selected by using purposive sampling method. Both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses were applied. The quantitative data were collected from the score of pre-test and posttest. The qualitative data were derived from the content analysis of group interviews. The result revealed that students significantly performed better scores on English writing ability test after being taught through the blog. In addition, students showed positive views because using blog was very interesting and it provided more cooperation between teacher and students.

Keywords

Blog, Writing, English, EFL, Student, Perception

1. Introduction

The pattern of English paragraph writing is not limited only to simply writing down on a piece of paper. Many teachers try to encourage their students to hand their assignments via technology means. Mumtaz (2000) claims that the reasons why many teachers choose the technology to act as an educational tool is because of the advances in technology and it is more modern. A number of students spend much of their time on social media in order to entertain themselves, l learn new things, or to spend their time on trendy activity via social media. Looi and Chen (2009) mention in their point of views that there is much consensus that technology is now an unavoidable and integral part of our everyday life, work, and home experiences. Technology is an alternative way that suits the new generation for learning language whenever and wherever they want.

In language learning, there are many kinds of technology that the teachers can use as a tool in order to develop students' paragraph writing. Blogging is one alternative tool in the writing field. It can be a gateway experience for students who will likely be using digital technology and media in their future endeavors regardless of their discipline. Pinkman (2005) claimed that it has been experimentally used as a tool to develop writing skills; implications indicate that although the blog should not replace face-to-face interaction, it may provide a practical environment where students can think, reflect, and create language slowly for a real-life audience. In addition, Wu (2006) identifies that a blog can motivate students to write and change classroom environments, especially writing class and can make it more interesting while providing more cooperation between teacher and students as well as among students. Furthermore, Mynard (2007) investigates the role of blog writing on reflection on language learning and learner autonomy. He concludes that this can be a tool to encourage students to reflect on their learning. Therefore, blogs have many advantages if it acts as a tool for learning English writing. It can be an alternative in order to help students reach the goal easily and perfectly. From the mentioned above, those are the factors that lead the researcher to decide to investigate the effectiveness of using the blog as a tool for enhancing high school students' English paragraph writing.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study aims (a) to examine the effectiveness of blogs on students' paragraph writing. and (b) to investigate students' perception when they have learnt paragraph writing through the blog.

3. Research Question

To study the effectiveness of using the blog as a tool for enhancing high school students' English paragraph writing, and students' perception when they have learnt paragraph writing through the blog, the present study addresses two questions.

1. Does the use of blogs enhance students' English paragraph writing?
2. What are students' perception towards learning paragraph writing through the blog?

4. Literature review

Writing is extensively used as a tool for communication in all manner of human endeavors, social interaction or leisure activity, and ever more so in the information age with the explosion of new knowledge. According to Weigle (2002), writing is considered to be an invaluable tool for people of many classes. Moreover, Rao (2007) pointed out that writing enhances people's thought processes and the organizing of ideas, and in developing the ability to summarize and criticize. Furthermore, Raimes (1983) pointed out that the close relationship between writing and thinking makes writing a valuable part of any language course. In conclusion, writing is an alternative form of communication and interacting with others. Paragraph writing process plays an important role in providing a secure path, or steps in paragraph writing. These steps are (a) writing situation, (b) brainstorming, (c) planning or outlining, (d) writing the first draft, (e) revision, (f) recursive writing, (g) editing, and (h) proofreading for students. Students can always review, revise, or make changes in their writing until they are satisfied with their work. There are many studies that provide the lesson through the internet. It also encourages students to learn English because the internet is a tool that has a lot of influence with humans recently. Students are the group of people that can learn the lesson via the internet access.

Blogs are easy-to-create and easy-to-maintain websites. Blogs have been around for over 16 years, but have become more popular since hosting websites such as Blogger.com introduced itself in 1999. Blogs function mostly as online journals and their content is traditionally personal. Blogs can be updated at any time using software that allows users with little or no

technical background to create, design and maintain the blog. Since blogs have only recently been gaining popularity as an educational tool, little research using blogs in the foreign language classroom has been done. Ward (2004), however, has described a blog project he implemented in his reading/writing class at the American University of Sharjah, and found many positive results. Ward concluded that a majority of his learners believed that the project assisted their language learning. He also commented that using blogs was a way to help increase student interest in their reading and writing. So, using blog as a tool for learning writing English provides several advantages for the teachers and the students.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study was designed and treated qualitative and quantitative research, aiming at improving students' paragraph writing through using blogs. The quantitative data were collected by comparing the scores of pre-test and posttest from all students in order to investigate the students' achievement, and examine the effectiveness of blogs on student's paragraph writing. The qualitative data were collected with group interviewing in order to investigate students' perception after they have learnt paragraph writing through the blog. This course is designed for students who take the Basic Writing English Course. This study aims to develop students' paragraph writing through the blog and to further obtain in-depth information about students' perception.

5.2 Participants

The population of this study will be 280 students, Grade 10. The participants of this study consist of 50 students who are seventeen years old on average, language program, Grade 10, taking the Basic writing English Course. They were chosen by using purposive sampling method.

5.3 Research Instruments

The research instrument being applied in this study for quantitative data collection consists of scores of the pre-test and post-test, lesson plan, and a writing rubric. Additionally, student interviews were collected as qualitative data. There were five steps that were used for lesson plan construction as in the following procedure. Firstly, the researcher studied the curriculum, course objectives, course description and course activities. Secondly, the researcher selected the language functions which were relevant to the course objectives. Thirdly, the

researcher designed lesson plans based on two principles of writing, organization and tenses. Furthermore, experts in English language teaching and studying examined the lesson plans in terms of content validity and construction validity. Finally, the researcher revised, modified and made some changes in the lesson plan. Every assignment had to be submitted through the blog for checking and being reflected on by the teacher and classmates. Students were divided into a group of five for draft reviewing. Three teachers checked students' final writing based on the writing rubric.

In this study, a pre-test and post-test were concerned with paragraph writing: all students had to write a paragraph based on the topic that the teacher had assigned. The score was earned from the students' paragraph writing ability. The case study, outlining the pre-test and the post-test, was clarified in the following. Firstly, the researcher had to study the curriculum, the course objectives, the course description and the use of activities. After that, the researcher had to identify the aims of paragraph writing. Thirdly, the researcher designed the lesson plan flexibly. Furthermore, experts in English language examined the test in terms of the content validity and construction validity. Moreover, the researcher had to try out the pre-test and post-test with students who had similar background as students in the experimental group. Finally, the researcher revised, modified and made some changes to improve the quality of the test.

In this case, the researcher used group interviewing to obtain in-depth information about students' perception. The researcher prepared three questions for the group interviewing; (a) "What do you think of learning English paragraph writing?", (b) "What do you want to suggest to improve the blog?", and (c) "What parts of this course do you like and dislike?". During the interview, the researcher recorded the answers of the participants. After the interview, the researcher had to transcribe the recorded answers analyze the information, and categorize the information as a content analysis.

5.4 Data Collection

Students were treated in the same way in six procedures. Firstly, the researcher provided pre-test, directions and the kind of the test. Secondly, all exercises, tasks, and assignments were provided in the same terms. Additionally, the students had received the same length of time to learn and review the knowledge, to do their writing, to give the feedback for their friends, and to hand the assignments to the teacher. Moreover, the teacher chose random students' writing mistake to discuss, allowing them to be more aware in the classroom. Lastly, rating score were not different. Three teachers checked students' writing based on the same writing rubrics.

The students were provided the knowledge through the blog. The teacher acted as an advisor. The students took the test through the blog, then the teacher asked the students to complete the exercises, tasks, and assignment through the blog. After that the students had to complete three assignments by posting them on the blog. The peer group gave feedback and comments on the blog. The teacher also gave the students feedback. Moreover, the students were asked by the teacher again to complete the post paragraph writing test through the blog. The researcher had to study the data by comparing the scores of the pre-test and posttest. Furthermore, the students were divided into groups of five for group interviewing in order to obtain in-depth information about students' perception. The researcher had to transcribe the recorded answers, analyze the information, and categorize the information as a content analysis.

5.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in using both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, and the procedures for analyzing the data were as follows; for quantitative data, the pre-test and post-test scores were introduced for reliability discussion based on the level of inter-rater variation. Then the score were obtained to assess the learning progress to determine the effectiveness of blog instruction. The scores were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation. The mean scores and standard deviation were calculated to determine whether the mean score of the pre-test and posttest were significantly different by T-test for comparing the students' writing ability before and after learning. For the qualitative data, after completing the course, students were interviewed for their perception towards usage of blog instruction. The students' answers were obtained the transcription. After the interview, the researcher had to transcribe the recorded answers, analyze the information, and categorize the information as a content analysis.

6. Results

The purposes of this study were: (a) to examine the effectiveness of blogs on student's paragraph writing, and (b) to investigate students' perception when they have learnt paragraph writing through the blog. This chapter presented the finding of the quantitative data collected from the pre-test and post-test. The mean scores and standard deviation were calculated to determine whether the mean score of the pretest and post-test were significantly different by T-test, comparing the students' writing ability before and after learning. Table 1 shows mean and standard deviation between pretest and post-test. It provided the students' achievement score when they were learnt paragraph writing via the blog.

Table 1: *Mean and Standard Deviation of students' achievement score between pre-test and post-test*

| Period of Testing	N	X	S.D.
Pretest	50	7.92	1.82
Post-test	50	15.46	1.99

As presented in Table 1, the results revealed that the mean score of the sample in the post-test was 15.46, with standard deviation of 1.99, whereas the mean score on the pre-test was 7.92 with S.D. = 1.82.

Table 2: *T-test and P-Value*

Period of Testing	N	t-test	p-value
Pretest	50	*-26.49	0.00
Post-test	50		

*p ≤ 0.01

As presented in Table 2, the results revealed that there are significant differences between pretest and post-test at 0.01 level. That means students' writing ability was improved after learning by using the blog.
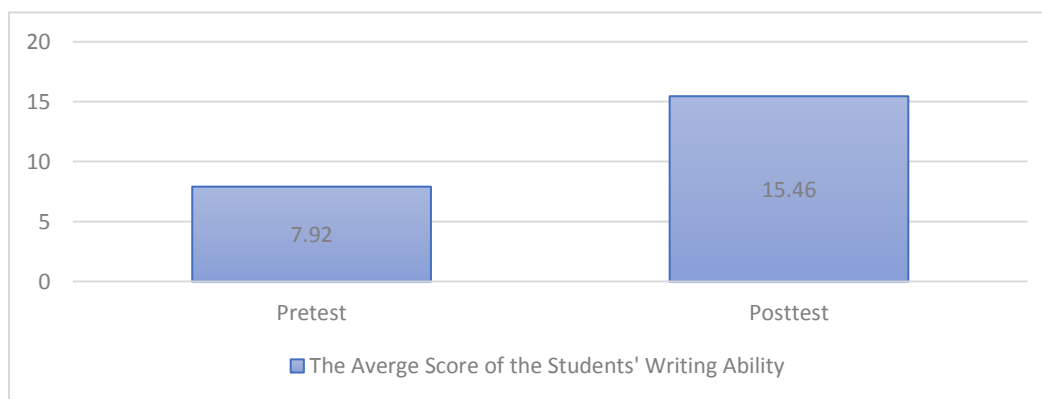
Figure 1: *The pretest and posttest Scores*

As presented in Figure 1, the results from the test showed that there are significant differences between pretest and post-test. It showed the students' achievement. They improve themselves in terms of writing's organization and grammar after they used blog as a platform.

In summary, the quantitative results obtained from the pretest and post-test, those results

indicated that learning paragraph writing via blogs could help the students in enhancing their English writing. The student achieved higher scores in English writing in the post-test compared to the pretest scores.

As for the qualitative result, interview was used to obtain in-depth information about students' perception toward English writing learning through using a blog. The researcher prepared three questions for the group interviewing; "What do you think of learning English paragraph writing via blog? ", "What do you want to suggest to improve the blog?", "In the blog, which parts of this course do you like and dislike?" During the interview, the researcher recorded the answers of the participants. Each group was interviewed about fifteen minutes. The teacher asked the students to spent extra time after school for interviewing. Not only three questions that the teacher provides, students also were asked the other questions based on the students answer for in-depth information. After the interview, the researcher transcribed the recorded answers, analyzed the information, and categorized the information as a content analysis.

Q1: "What do you think of learning English paragraph writing via blog?"

Fifty students were interviewed about learning English paragraph writing via blog by the researcher. They were divided into groups of five. Each group was interviewed approximately 15 minutes. All students had the positive attitude about learning English while they had learnt paragraph via the blog. For example,

Group A: At first, we didn't know how to accurately construct sentences, but later we found this activity was helpful for our practice.

Group C: We thought it was very useful because we were able to access to the blog in order to learn wherever and whenever we wanted.

Group E: We like the lessons which teacher provided in the blog. It was a guideline for us to learn how to write by ourselves. If we did not understand any units, we could access to that part immediately.

Group F: We thought our English language and writing organization skills had improved. We thought that learning via blog provided a lot of chances for practicing.

In addition, all students thought that blogging motivated them to write and it changed classroom environments. For example,

Group A: We interested in using the Internet because we could surf the Internet whenever and wherever via our mobiles, computer tablets or even school library computer.

Group B: We had our own decision to plan our style of learning as promoting autonomy. We thought that blog was the proper platform for learning paragraph writing. The program was not hard and complicated to access.

Group J: We were familiar with blog as a platform for journal writing. So, when the teacher provided the tasks as a paragraph writing, we were able to use it easily.

Moreover, learning paragraph via the blog provided a space for sharing. For example,

Group C: We thought that we had a space for sharing our writing with our teachers and our friends.

Group I: We learnt the strengthens and weakness from our friends' writing.

Group H: Because of easy blog access, not only our teachers could see our task, but all students could see them also. So, we think it made lessons more interesting and provided more cooperation between teacher and us, and among our students.

Furthermore, blog provided more than tasks and test. For example,

Group D: we thought that it was very nice because teacher prepared the practical exercises, useful information, interesting website via blog. It was very resourceful.

Group F: We thought that blog was the platform that the teacher could prepare any sources that they thought it was very useful for the us.

Group G: In our views, it was the guideline for the us to search more information by ourselves to develop our writing ability

Q2: "What do you want to suggest improving the blog?"

Most of the students provided many suggestions for teacher. Many students had teacher provide more tasks in other field, not just paragraph writing. For example,

Group A: We would like to see more examples of the writing tasks.

Group B: We expected to see more reviewing of the grammatical rules for helping them to construct the sentences accuracy.

Group D: We would like teacher to provide more examples, grammatical tasks, and some more useful websites in the blog. It would be the easy to access into the blog and easy to link to other sources.

Group E: We would like teacher to set proper time for giving the feedback. When we got confused in the tasks, we would like some suggestions. But there were many times that we had to take the time for waiting the answers.

Group H: We appreciated the answers and the feedbacks that teacher provided on

weekend or even some massages that the teacher texted to us at night. It seemed very flexible for learning in anytime.

Q3: "In the blog, which parts of this course do you like and dislike?"

There were many parts that students like. The example of the paragraph writing, blog provided a lot of examples that were easy for understanding. For example,

Group G: We thought it was easy for the beginner who expected to practice writing ability like us. We started with imitation and changed some information. After that, we changed other parts, for example; adjective, adverb, the pattern of sentences, etc. So, it was not hard for us

Group H: There were many activities provided via blog. It is not just the tasks, but we learnt from the activity. The activities gave us more chance for practicing.

Moreover, the activities that teacher provided in the blog were more interesting. For example,

Group A: We had the interaction with our friends when I learnt paragraph writing via blog.

Group C: We thought some tasks challenged us to compete with our friends.

Group G: We learnt many pitfalls from our friend exercises and writings.

However, students attributed learning value to the Internet activities, it appears that they did not believe that any of the writing activities (Internet, pen pal letters, or threaded discussion) contributed significantly to the development of writing skills. For example,

Group H: We thought writing skill were very hard. We preferred to learn in classrooms with teachers.

Group I: We thought learning paragraph writing through blog was too time consuming. We felt that we invested more time on the technology-enhanced course than we would have in a regular class.

7. Conclusion

As previously stated, the purposes of this study were: (a) to examine the effectiveness of blogs on student's paragraph writing, and (b) to investigate students' perception when they have learnt paragraph writing through the blog. The quantitative findings showed that students had significant scores on English writing ability tests after being taught through the blog. That is, the use of blogs was more effective in enhancing students' English writing ability. In addition, the

analysis of the qualitative data showed that the students taught using blogs had more positive views in writing.

This study was limited to the grade 10 students at a government secondary school, which was a very particular group of students. The findings might not be representative of students in other grade levels and might not be representative or generalizable to other groups of students in different contexts. Furthermore, this study intended to reveal the effectiveness of using blogs in English paragraph writing. Grammar and organization of writing were selected because those basic skills should be initially taught to students before learning other kind of writing skills.

The results of the study revealed that learning paragraph writing via blog had increase students' English paragraph writing ability. Therefore, adopting learning paragraph writing via blog could be implemented with other groups at any level for other kind of writing. It would be worth investigating how effective learning English by using blog is on other skills so that instructors can use findings for improving and developing their teacher process.

As this research is mainly focus on writing organization and accuracy when they use the blog as the platform for learning, future research should focus on content of the writing to challenge the student's ability and determine whether blog can help students develop content of writing.

8. Acknowledgement

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